



## Question for review by Steering Committee\*

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**TO:** Senate

**FROM:** Senators Levey and Tureli

**SUBJECT:** Question Regarding Administration's response to the SSMU's Palestine Solidary Policy

**MEETING DATE:** April 19, 2022

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**PREAMBLE:** Given Principal and Vice-Chancellor Fortier's statement from October 26, 2020<sup>1</sup> that "McGill's commitment to academic excellence requires that the University support an open environment where different views and ideas can be expressed and debated with mutual respect and without fear. This freedom is central to McGill's mission of advancing learning through teaching, scholarship, and service to society"; and

Given that both Amnesty International<sup>2</sup> and Human Rights Watch<sup>3</sup> have reported "*massive seizures of Palestinian land and property, unlawful killings, forcible transfer, drastic movement restrictions, and the denial of nationality and citizenship to Palestinians,*" which they describe as tantamount to apartheid under international law; and

Given that there is a history of successful student activism at McGill against South African apartheid in the 1980s; and

Given that the student body has voted to combat apartheid once again through the SSMU Palestine Solidarity Policy<sup>4</sup>, which was approved through a democratic process; and

Given that Deputy Provost Fabrice Labeau, in an MRO communication

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mcgill.ca/principal/communications/statements/academic-freedom-and-inclusiveness>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

<sup>4</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1drVfxAnCjS8mwDuzDrY85y-62PXm-IdU2XgUz17qOa0/edit>

to the entire university community on March 24, 2022, claimed that this policy would “create excessive polarization in our community, encourage a culture of ostracization and disrespect due to students’ identity, religious or political beliefs”; is “in contradiction with the principles expressed by SSMU in its own constitution”; and may result in the termination of SSMU’s Memorandum of Agreement with the University.

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**QUESTION:**

1. How does the SSMU’s Palestine Solidarity Policy, to quote Deputy Provost Labeau’s MRO, “create excessive polarization in our community, encourage a culture of ostracization and disrespect due to students’ identity, religious or political beliefs”?
2. In what way is the SSMU in contradiction with the principles expressed by SSMU in its own constitution?
3. How does the SSMU’s Palestine Solidarity Policy violate SSMU’s obligations under its Memorandum of Agreement with the University?

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**RESPONSE**

**from Senator Fabrice Labeau:**

**Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)**

I would like to start by thanking Senators Levey and Tureli for their question, which will allow me to give further context around the communication that I sent to the community on March 24.

Over the last few years, our campus has seen several flashpoints around the theme of Zionism and the Palestinian occupied territories. While the University (and I personally) fully subscribe to the principles contained in the Principal’s message from October 2020 quoted by Senators Levey and Tureli, the public stances taken by some student groups on this particular issue cannot be said to “support an open environment where different views and ideas can be expressed and debated with mutual respect and without fear”, as they have often generated debate that has descended into

uncivil and exclusionary discourse. This has led many of our Jewish students to feel targeted, unwelcome and even unsafe on our campuses.

I do realize that proponents of taking public stances such as the Palestine Solidarity Policy do so with the genuine intent of making what they believe will be a positive impact on the world, and that they feel that their views' alignment with those expressed by some organizations and some UN resolutions justify these actions. Yet we cannot ignore the very real harm that adopting such stances causes within our own community, and to a portion of the student body that SSMU is meant to represent as a whole. Irrespective of the intent of such a policy, its impact, as we see it on the ground amongst our community members, is to make a portion of our community feel unwelcome, ostracized and fearful of expressing their identity and views on our campuses.

In this context, the Palestine Solidarity Policy cannot be considered to “facilitate communication and interaction between all students from all McGill communities” or to “act in the best interests of [SSMU’s] Members as a whole”. Moreover, it does not align with the stated principle that “all the SSMU’s endeavours shall be undertaken with full respect for human dignity [...] and without discrimination on the basis of irrelevant personal characteristics that include but are not limited to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, [or] religion [...]”. These quoted passages are explicit commitments that SSMU makes in its constitution. The Policy in question clearly falls short of these commitments.

The Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between McGill university and SSMU outlines that SSMU is considered in default of the MoA when it violates its own constitution. The fact that the Policy in question represented a violation by SSMU of its own constitution explains my MRO of March 24th, 2022.